

CQ TODAY ONLINE NEWS:

Nov. 17, 2010 – 12:29 p.m.

House Leaders Weigh Haiti Bill as Vehicle for Immigration Measure

By Theo Emery and Joanna Anderson, CQ Staff

Democratic House leaders may use a bill aimed at aiding Haitian orphans as a vehicle for an unrelated immigration measure, a proposal that spurred immediate criticism from the Haiti bill's GOP sponsor.

The House leadership has hinted that they would seek passage of the immigration legislation known as the DREAM Act during the lame-duck session, but the bill hasn't yet been put on the floor calendar and leaders have given few clues as to when it might come up.

Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., issued a letter late Tuesday saying House leaders want to graft the measure onto his Help HAITI Act, which would grant permanent U.S. residency to up to 1,400 Haitian orphans admitted to the United States after the Jan. 12 earthquake. The bill had been scheduled for floor consideration earlier this week, but was dropped from the agenda.

"I'm at a total loss," Fortenberry said. "This is about helping the children in the wake of the earthquake."

The Haiti bill (HR 5283) would authorize the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to grant permanent resident status to children from Haiti who were admitted to the United States after the earthquake as part of a humanitarian entry policy. It would grant those children adoption eligibility if they obtain permanent resident status prior to turning 18 and are adopted by a U.S. citizen.

After the earthquake, DHS implemented a policy to allow orphaned children from Haiti to enter the United States temporarily. The policy permitted the legal entry of children who have been confirmed by Haiti as orphans eligible for intercountry adoption, and children who had been undergoing adoption proceedings in which U.S. citizens were the prospective adoptive parents.

Applications for legal entry under this policy were suspended on April 15.

“After these families have opened their hearts and homes to some of the world’s most vulnerable children, this security is the least we can give them. The House of Representatives should affirm this by passing the Help HAITI Act, free of unrelated, controversial measures,” Fortenberry wrote.

Though the letter didn’t specify which “controversial measures” were at issue, a GOP aide said Fortenberry was referring to legislation known as the DREAM Act, which would extend conditional legal status to some children of illegal immigrants, if they go to college or join the military. As many as 2.1 million young adults fit the bill’s criteria, although only an estimated 825,000 would likely benefit.

A Democratic aide confirmed that the Haiti bill was a possible vehicle for the immigration measure, but said that no decision had been made.

The immigration legislation is one of several measures that Democratic leaders hope to shoehorn into the lame-duck session, but most Republicans will push back just as hard.

In a Senate floor speech on Wednesday morning, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., laid out a narrow range of priorities that Republicans could work on with Democrats, including job creation, debt reduction, nuclear power, clean-coal technology and maintaining the Bush tax cuts. Immigration was not on the list.

“I would be remiss if I didn’t also express some dismay with the priorities that are being put forward from the other side of the aisle,” McConnell said.

Latino groups and advocacy organizations are clamoring for Democratic leaders to repay Hispanic voters for their high turnout for Democrats on Nov. 2. The bill’s supporters also know that any legislation seeking to provide a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants will stand almost no chance in the 112th Congress with Republicans in control of the House.

President Obama pledged Tuesday to help with the DREAM Act's passage, telling Hispanic lawmakers at the White House that he would urge members of Congress to vote for the measure.

Frances Symes and Doug Clendenin contributed to this story.

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Fox News:

Haiti Adoption Complicates DREAM Act Push

Meanwhile, the administration will be defending the president's call to include the DREAM Act in the lame-duck session, presumably tacked on to some piece of emergency legislation. The president came out in support of the bill, which would give amnesty to illegal immigrants who go to college or serve in the armed forces, after meeting with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. With scant hope for a border fix or a "pathway to citizenship" in the next two years and his own reelection bid looming, Obama needs to show his support for some kind of amnesty program.

Republicans, though, are expected to raise a ruckus over the Help Haiti Act, a measure to ease adoptions from the devastated nation. Democrats yanked the bill from the calendar and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) has sent a letter expressing concern about rumors that the popular measure will be used to aid the passage of the DREAM Act. One could be amended to the other or both could be added to another bill for a sweet and sour effect.

From Fortenberry's letter to the Democratic leadership: "My office has heard reports that this critical legislative fix, which would clear legal obstacles to U.S. citizenship for as many as 1200 Haitian orphans who were in the process of being adopted before the January 12 earthquake, may be used as a vehicle for a controversial immigration measure. Please know that while these vulnerable orphans' status remains in limbo, they have fewer legal protections, may not be eligible for critical resources, and risk being forced to return to Haiti."

Read more: <http://politics.blogs.foxnews.com/2010/11/17/todays-power-play-bloomberg-bid-wo>

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